

## **Instability of Self-Identity Found in Code-Switching**

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*English*

"Japanese students have a tendency to change their attitude depending on the language in use. In other words, they are not like typical Japanese when using a foreign language, English", said Hayashi Chikio, president of Japan Poll Association.

I have been concerned with the theme that when people speak in a foreign language they sometimes change their attitudes, beliefs, and thought patterns from their own to what they perceive as better suiting the background culture of that language. For example, some Japanese people who are usually quiet and moderate become aggressive and overly frank when speaking in English. This kind of change can be regarded as an instability of self-identity. It is unknown whether or not this tendency is significantly stronger among Japanese people than among speakers of other ethnic groups, but according to the results of a certain study<sup>1)</sup>, Japanese people do seem to display this tendency. Although it is difficult to identify the causes, a few of the possible causes can be listed as: 1) trying to fit in smoothly with one's surroundings rather than sticking stubbornly to a fixed individual personality is a traditional behavior pattern in the Japanese character ; 2) the high esteem in which most Japanese hold English and English-speaking culture ; 3) problems in Japanese foreign language education. In this paper, I will explore the ramifications of the third and last factor.

### **1. Introduction**

Usually people's social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through their language. One of the functions which relate to speaker's identity has been studied recently by Gumperz, Goffman and others. Though research in this particular field is still new and full of mystery, it seems undoubtful that people form, recognize and express their identity by means of language. In terms of ethnolinguistic identity, people can express their "true" identity only in their own native language. Then, where does this put the speaker's identity when attempting to communicate in a foreign language? In this paper, exploring the results of the

survey conducted on Japanese university students who responded to a questionnaire both in their native language, Japanese, and their foreign language, English, we will be able to see the relationship between one's self-identity and a foreign language, which has above all been defined and influenced by Japanese foreign language education.

## **2. A Brief Background of This Survey**

In 1970s, following Lambert's findings that students with an integrative motivation were markedly more proficient in L2 learning than those instrumentally motivated, acculturation, i.e., the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language was emphasized in the field of TESL. At the same time, along with the cognitive approach, not only linguistic competence but communicative competence was valued. As a result, many texts and materials since then have been designed for learners to acquire "natural" and "correct" use of English. In Japan also, the theory of TESL has been applied to TEFL. With textbooks which introduce American cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes, students learned some pieces of knowledge on American culture. They learned that when they say, "Hello" they are supposed to look at the interlocutor's eyes and shake hands. They learned that they are supposed to say their given name first when they say their name in English. In such English education, it is no wonder that students believe that when they communicate in English, they should express themselves or behave in accordance with American cultural rules.

However, when we see an Indonesian lady say, "Hello" putting her hands together in front, or hear many fellow Asian people say their family name first even in English, we need to reconsider the aims of English education in Japan.

Knowledge about the interlocutor's background culture will help improve cross-cultural communication. But how does the knowledge of foreign culture learned through foreign language education affect a speaker's self-identity in speaking in that language?

## **3. A Similar Survey**

A survey which shows the instability of self-identity in code-switching is introduced in Hayashi's book "Nihon rashisano Kouzou". It shows that Japanese students have a tendency to answer differently to the same question depending on the language in use. According to his

survey, Japanese students prefer indirect or fuzzy answers to Japanese questions but prefer assertive answers to English questions, while American students prefer assertive answers to both Japanese and English questions (Hayashi, 1996, See Appendix)

#### **4. Explanation of This Survey**

##### **(1) Purpose**

The purpose of this survey is to demonstrate Japanese people's instability of self-identity in code-switching from Japanese to English, and try to find out some probable causes of it.

##### **(2) Subject**

The subjects are students from two Japanese universities <sup>2)</sup>. They were divided into two groups : (I) students who learned cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. the previous year with a textbook <sup>3)</sup> dealing with the theme, and those who reported having studied the theme using a similar kind of textbook and ; (II) students who heard about the cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. but had not formally studied this topic in class. The number of the subjects in group (I) is 75, while there are 166 students covered in group (II).

##### **(3) Method**

Nine situations where I suspected I would find different reactions between Japanese and American were chosen for the study. In order to minimize the influence of the difference in English proficiency level among subjects, the style of the questions was made not "open" but "simple choice". Subjects were required to answer the question in each situation by choosing either A or B. A was supposed to be a typical Japanese reaction, while B was a typical American one. The questionnaire has an English version and a Japanese version. Subjects were expected to answer both versions at the same time, first in Japanese and then in English. Ideally, subjects should have been asked to answer two versions on different days. In that case, however, matching the answers of two versions of the same subject was difficult. For fear that subjects should copy the answers of one version into the other, a warning was given on its cover page. Checking their answers in both versions, I attempted to reveal patterns indicating some instability of self-identity. Those who answered in AA or BB patterns in both versions were considered stable regardless of the language in use, and those who answered AB or BA were considered instable depending on the language in use. In order to evaluate significant difference between Group (I) and Group (II), the chi-square test was used for statistical analysis.

## (4) Findings

Number of subjects and its percentage who gave different answers depending on the language in use is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Frequency Distribution of Inconsistency (AB/BA)

| Number of Inconsistent Answer    | 0     | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5    | 6    | 7 | 8    | 9 |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|---|------|---|
| Number of Subjects in Group(I)   | 16    | 14    | 20    | 9     | 7     | 4    | 5    | 0 | 0    | 0 |
| %                                | 21.33 | 18.67 | 26.67 | 12.0  | 9.33  | 5.33 | 6.67 | 0 | 0    | 0 |
| Number of Subjects in Group (II) | 39    | 25    | 25    | 27    | 31    | 15   | 2    | 0 | 2    | 0 |
| %                                | 23.49 | 15.06 | 15.06 | 16.27 | 18.67 | 9.04 | 1.20 | 0 | 1.20 | 0 |

The mean of each subject in group (I) is 2.12, while it is 2.31 in group (II).

As seen in Table 1, the number of subjects who gave consistent answers both to Japanese questions and to English questions (AA/BB) were 16, which was 21.33 % in the Group (I), and 39, which was 23.49 % in the Group (II). In this survey the subjects who showed perfect consistency in both languages constituted less than a quarter of both groups.

The tendencies of Group (I) and Group (II)

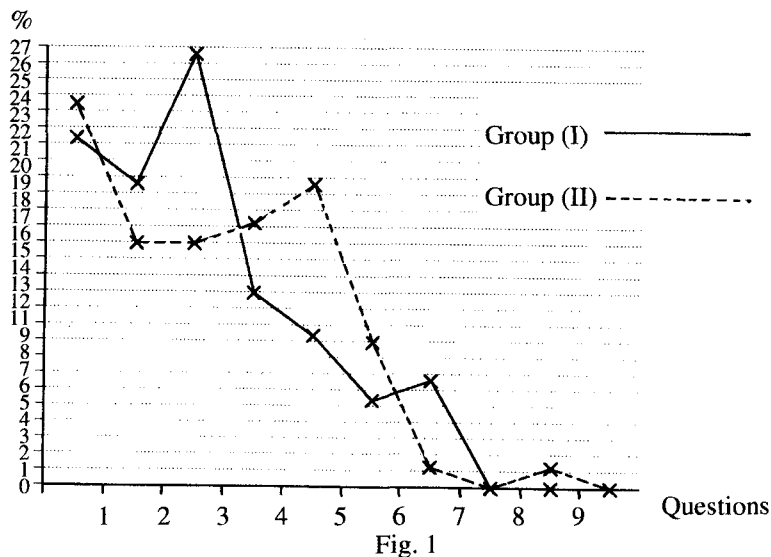


Fig. 1

Fig. 1 illustrates the different tendency between Group (I) and Group (II). In Group (I), a peak in the rate of inconsistency is seen on two, while in Group (II), a peak is seen on four. Considering the means of both groups 2.12 and 2.31, respectively, I divided each group into two, with a value of three as the line of partition.

**Table 2 The number of inconsistency, X, under and more than 3.**

|            | N   | $X < 3$       | $X \geq 3$    |
|------------|-----|---------------|---------------|
| Group (I)  | 75  | 50<br>(66.7%) | 25<br>(33.3%) |
| Group (II) | 166 | 89<br>(53.6%) | 77<br>(46.4%) |

The result of chi-square test is  $X^2 = 3.605$  ( $0.1 < P < 0.05$ ). As for P value,  $P=0.1$  is 2.706 while  $P=0.05$  is 3.841. Since  $X^2=3.841$  ( $P=0.05$ ) is considered significant, there is no significant difference between Group (I) and Group (II) on statistical analysis. However, 3.605 is fairly close to 3.841. It might mean lower instability of self-identity in Group (I) than Group (II). In other words, students who learned cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. with a textbook dealing with the theme showed lower tendency of instability of self-identity in switching codes from Japanese to English.

## 5. Discussion

The hypothesis of this survey was that having knowledge on American culture might induce students' assimilation to American cultural norms when answering a questionnaire in English. Being given lots of information about different norms of each culture, students might show instability of self-identity by trying to identify themselves with native speakers of the language in use. Actually, however, the result was opposite. For some reason students who studied the cultural difference in class showed less inconsistency in answering both English and Japanese versions of the questionnaire. Though the reason is unknown and further studies are needed, one of the possible reasons is that Group (I) students not only got the information on cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. but also had frequently discussed the theme. Through the discussion, they sometimes found not differences but, rather, basic similarities between the two cultures, which might have promoted their self-confidence.

On the other hand, it is unknown what kind of class Group (II) students have experienced and whether or not they have had an opportunity to discuss such cross-cultural themes. In that sense, the group division of this survey becomes unclear. However, the findings give us some suggestions that : 1) having knowledge on background culture of a foreign language do not always induce learner's instability of self-identity in switching codes between their mother tongue and the foreign language and ; 2) knowledge, instead of pieces of information randomly obtained, about and a deep understanding of the culture of the target language might promote learner's self-confidence and result in stable self-identity.

## 6. Further Problems

Among some possible causes mentioned first in this paper, one of the 3) which was examined this time may be eliminated in one sense. However, the theme of self-identity is in a fuzzy area ; there still remains a need of further investigation. One area of possible research would be the administrating of a similar kind of survey to foreign people to find out whether or not this instability of self-identity is unique to or unusually strong among Japanese people because of the behavior patterns acceptable according to traditional Japanese values. Another would be an investigation into the case of another foreign language, especially non-Western, that does not have the culturally overbearing dominance that English has on the Japanese psyche, to see whether learners follow its background cultural rules in using that foreign language with the same levels of instability of self-identity that appeared with the English students I had surveyed. There are still other aspects of this field to be studied. Hopefully, accumulating these investigations, I could finally find some relation between a foreign language and Japanese people's self-identity.

## NOTES

<sup>1)</sup> See 3. A Similar Survey on page 2

<sup>2)</sup> freshmen and sophomores of Nursing Course in Hamamatsu University School of Medicine and juniors of Integrated Natural Science Course in Aichi University of Education

<sup>3)</sup> Polite Fiction by Nancy Sakamoto and Reiko Naotsuka

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## APPENDIX

(1) 「日本らしさの構造」(p.175) に示されている調査結果

### 中間的回答への反応

| 調査対象          | 質問文の言語 | 断定的回答 | 中間的回答 | その他 (%) |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|---------|
| 筑波大学生         | 英語     | 7 0   | 2 9   | 1       |
|               | 日本語    | 4 2   | 5 8   | 0       |
| ハワイの日本人学生     | 英語     | 6 0   | 3 7   | 3       |
|               | 日本語    | 4 4   | 5 4   | 2       |
| ハワイ非日系アメリカ人学生 | 英語     | 7 0   | 3 0   | 0       |
|               | 日本語    | 5 0   | 4 5   | 0       |

(2)今回の調査に使ったアンケートの質問内容

1. 日本語版質問

以下のような状況で、あなたは A, B どちらにより近い答え方をしますか。A, B どちらかを 1 つ選んでください。

1) 上司宅で行われる新年会に誘われましたが、内心、お正月ぐらいは家族でのんびり過ごしたいと思っています。

- A. はい、ありがとうございます。都合がつけばうかがいたと思います。
- B. はい、ありがとうございます。でもお正月は家族と過ごしたいと思いますのですみませんが、うかがえません。

2) 話し合いの席で、S さんが意見を述べました。あなたも S さんと同じ意見でした。

- A. S さんと同じ意見だし、特に付け足すこともないので、だまっていました。
- B. 「私も S さんと同じ意見です。」と言いました。

3) あなたは自分の新婚家庭に同僚を招待しようとしています。その時、自分の新妻のことに ついても少し話します。

- A. 彼女、美人でもないし料理もそれほど上手いわけでもないけれど、まあとにかくよかったら今週の土曜日夕食でも食べにこない？
- B. 彼女、料理もけっこう上手いし、ユーモアのセンスも抜群なんだ。きっと楽しいからよかったら今週の土曜日夕食でも食べにこない？

4) あなたの息子さんはかなり優秀です。人を笑わせるのも上手です。知人があなたの息子さんのことを「ご子息は頭がいいですね。」とほめてくれました。

- A. いいえ、いつもばかなことばかり言って、ふざけてばかりで困るんです。
- B. ありがとうございます。人を楽しくさせるのも得意で、とてもいい子だと思っています。



- 5) ホテルのフロントで人と待ち合わせたのですが、「フロント」違いで、ホテルの前で30分もその人を待たせてしまいました。
- A. すみませんでした。私も時間どおり来たのですが、別のところで待っていたようで申し訳ありませんでした。
- B. 「フロント」とはホテルのフロントデスクのつもりで、私もそちらで30分お待ちしていました。
- 6) 友人宅で「飲み物は何がよろしいですか」と聞かれました。
- A. 「何でも結構です。」と答えました。
- B. 「紅茶/コーヒーいただけますか」と答えました。
- 7) 長い列にならんでいたとき、前の人と目が合いました。
- A. そのまま目をそらし、だまってたっていました。
- B. にっこり笑い、ちょっとした会話を交わしました。
- 8) レストランで食事をしていたら知人のSが声を掛けてきました。あなたは同席していた友人を紹介しますか。
- A. 突然の事だし、あえてその必要もないと思ったので紹介しませんでした。
- B. その場限りだとは思ったけれど、やはり礼儀上紹介しました。
- 9) 友人とカフェテリアに食事に行きました。その友人が「ソースどこにあるかしら」と言いました。
- A. その友人のためにカウンターからソースを取ってきてあげました。
- B. 「ソースはカウンターの上にありますよ」と教えてあげました。

## 2. Questions in English Version

In the following questions, which answer better describes your answer. Please choose either A or B.

- 1) You are invited to your boss's house for a New Year home party. But you would like to spend New Year's Day with your family.  
  
A. Thank you very much. I'd like to come if I can make it.  
B. Thank you very much, but I'd rather stay home with my family on New Year's Day.  
Anyway, thank you for your kind invitation.
- 2) At a meeting, S said his/her opinion. You agree with S.  
  
A. You have the same opinion as S, and have nothing special to add. So, you keep silent at the meeting.  
B. You say, "I quite agree with S".
- 3) You invite your colleague to your newly married home. At that time, you mention your wife.  
  
A. Well, my wife is not really beautiful nor a good cook, but anyway, why don't you come over to my house for dinner this Saturday?  
B. Well, my wife is pretty good at cooking and she has a good sense of humor. I'm sure we'll have a good time. Why don't you come over to my house for dinner this Saturday?
- 4) your son is doing well at school. He also likes to make people laugh. Your acquaintance says, "Your son is quite intelligent, isn't he?"  
  
A. Not really. He always says silly things and keep saying jokes.  
B. Thank you. He also likes making people laugh. I'm very proud of him.
- 5) You and your acquaintance were to meet at "front". You meant "front desk in the hotel" while your acquaintance thought it meant "in front of the hotel". As the result, you both waited for each other for 30 minutes. You thought it strange, and finally found out the reason.

- A. I'm sorry. I came on time but waited for you at a different place. I'm sorry.  
B. I meant to say, "front desk in the hotel". I also waited for you for 30 minutes.
- 6) At your friend's house, you were asked, "What would you like to drink?"
- A. You would say, "Anything would be fine."  
B. You would say, "I'd like some tea / coffee, please."
- 7) You are standing in line. Your eyes and those of a person in front of you met.
- A. You just turn your eyes away, and keep silent.  
B. You smile and have a small talk.
- 8) You and your friend were at a restaurant. Your acquaintance S happened to find you and came over to your table. Do you introduce your friend?
- A. It was quite a sudden happening. You didn't think you need to, so you didn't introduce your friend to S.  
B. You knew that your friend and S would never see again, but anyway you introduce your friend to S as an etiquette.
- 9) You and your friend went to a cafeteria. Your friend said, "I wonder where the sauce is".
- A. You went to the counter and brought the sauce for your friend.  
B. You said, "It's on the counter."

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